

Last edited by Lisa Holifield, June 7

Sgt. Scott Haynes made his way out of his seahut and through more than two feet of snow on his way to his way to work, where he was responsible for protecting his task force commander along with fellow members of the Personnel Security Detachment of Task Force Rifles. Haynes, who lives in Ridgeland and is a member of Company B, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 155<sup>th</sup> Infantry, based in Poplarville, admittedly is not used to snow, much less the miserable conditions he was forced to endure as he patrolled the winter countryside of Bosnia-Herzegovina.

“We had a blizzard on (Dec.) 23<sup>rd</sup>, so we definitely had a white Christmas,” Haynes said, with a brief hint of a smile. “The weather conditions there can make work pretty tedious, but such is life in Bosnia.”

And such was life for Task Force 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 155<sup>th</sup> Infantry, headquartered in McComb, also known as “Task Force Rifles,” during their six month rotation in the war-torn country. The approximately 400-man Task Force departed in September 2001 to begin its peacekeeping mission as part of Stabilization Force 10 (SFOR 10). They returned to Mississippi in April. The SFOR 10 rotation was the continuation of a five-year NATO mission brought about by the Dayton Peace Accords, which brought an end to the five-year war in Bosnia, one of the bloodiest wars since World War II.

Task Force Rifles underwent intense training designed to focus their mission on a peacekeeping role, and they excelled in their training, impressing both their National Guard counterparts and active component evaluators.

“The training we received was excellent,” Haynes said. “We became very competent in patrolling techniques, weapons storage site inspections, and other aspects of our job in country,” he said.

Mississippi is hardly synonymous with blizzard-like conditions, but inclement weather didn’t hamper these soldiers in their mission, according to Maj. Lee Smithson of Jackson, Executive Officer for Task Force Rifles. In fact, Smithson said his troops overcame all obstacles and excelled in their job.

“We conducted one-third more patrols than any task force before us,” Smithson said, pointing out that while previous task forces conducted 80 to 82 patrols per week, Task Force Rifles increased that number to 100 per week.

“The reason for the soldiers’ desire to excel comes from the nature of their jobs as guardsmen,” Smithson said.

“As civilian soldiers, we truly do care about the local population,” he said. “We weren’t there to just execute a mission, we really do care and I think that showed in the way we conducted our mission.”

Governor Ronnie Musgrove, who accompanied Mississippi’s Adjutant General, Maj. Gen. James H. Lipscomb III and several state legislators and civic leaders to Bosnia in December, was also very proud of what he saw of the soldiers there.

“They are uncommon soldiers presented with an uncommon task, and I am so proud of all of them,” Musgrove said. “I want them to know that what they accomplished reflects greatly upon themselves, their state and the United States of America.”

“It’s what we are doing over here that matters, and it makes you feel good,” Haynes added. “We’re preventing people from dying.”

That mentality is what has set these soldiers apart from their peers and has gained the respect of military and civilians alike, according to Smithson.

“These soldiers are not just looked upon as simply National Guard soldiers anymore, they are all-around soldiers,” Smithson said. “They do more than their counterparts for one simple reason – they care.”